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“Enwau Prydeinig gwyn?” Problematizing the idea of “White British” names and naming practices from a Welsh perspective

Abstract

Our personal names are a potential source of information to those around us regarding several interconnected aspects of our lives, including our: ethnic, geographic, linguistic and cultural community of origin, and perhaps our national identity. However, interpretations regarding identifiably “White British” names and naming practices are problematic, due to the incorrect underlying assumption of a homogeneity in the indigenous communities of ‘Britain’. The field of names and naming is a particularly good example of the wide linguistic and cultural chasm between the Welsh and English indigenous ‘British’ communities, and thus the generally paradoxical concept of “Britishness” in its wider sense. In this paper, I will explore names and naming practices which are particularly distinctive to a Welsh context, thus unearthing and opening up for wider debate the hidden diversity within the assumed and imposed category of “White British privilege”.

Key words

Welsh; Wales; Cymraeg; Cymru; Names; Onomastics

Introduction

“Names are a linguistic universal – all languages make use of names – most commonly, but not exclusively, to identity individual people and places” (Hough, 2016, Kindle location 51). Names are “a word or combination of words by which a person, place, or thing, a body or class, or any object of thought is designated, called, or known” (Dictionary.com, 2017). Our personal names are an essential aspect of communication, enabling us to make a distinction between individuals when referring to them, or conversing with them - particularly within a group situation. As with all words, names are shaped by, and indicative of, the languages from which they emanate. The alphabet, grammar and phonetics of a language will all have an impact on the format of individuals names, with regards to their content, ordering, transcription and pronunciation.

In the UK, modern naming practices tend to follow the Anglo-Saxon naming custom of using the forename(s) and surname formula, since Anglo-Saxon customs are dominant both legally and culturally (Finch, 2008). Indeed, it is a legal requirement in the UK for individuals to have at least a forename and a surname (Pilcher, 2016). Viewing the surname as a family name reflects Anglo-Saxon naming customs, and, as Finch (2008) point out, does not necessarily reflect “the naming customs of other cultural groups now settled in the UK” (Finch, 2008). However, what is missing here, I would argue, is an acknowledgement that this also does not reflect the naming practices of the indigenous linguistic and cultural minority community of the Welsh-language community.

Recent onomastic (scholarly study of names) research has tended to focus on migrant groups and their being perceived as Other, based on their names (Pennesi, 2016). In Canada, extensive efforts are made in the university context, with regards to convocation ceremonies, to ensure correct, or desired, pronunciation of graduands’ names, including where second generation migrant names may now be pronounced differently than in their country of origin,

including no longer using an alveolar trill, or rolling ‘r’ (Pennesi, 2014). Meanwhile, in the UK, the focus is also on migrant names and their attempted utilisation in constructing migrants in terms of their Otherness (Madziva, 2017). Some recent research in this area framed the discussion in terms of there being names which index as “White British” and those which do not, leading to “White British privilege” being afforded to those with names which index in this way, prompting migrants to change their names and/ or select more Anglicized names for their children (Wykes, 2015a, 2015b).

However, whilst there are undoubtedly names which index for “privilege” in a UK context, constructing these names as “White British” is highly problematic. The term “British” ignores the diversity of indigenous White communities which exist in the UK, including the Welsh-speaking community. Welsh names, which are shaped by their origins in the Welsh language, most certainly do not index as “White British”, since they are even based on a different alphabet to English. Additionally, the historical and political context of Wales and England means that there are, in certain circumstances, differences in the structures of Welsh names, with ‘surnames’ not necessarily being ‘family names’.

In this paper therefore, I will problematize the concept of homogenous “White British” naming practices, and make the case instead for a shift to describing them as “English-sounding”, or else defining “ethnic names” as “that they originated in a language other than English” (Pennesi, 2016). I will begin by giving a broad overview of the differences between the Welsh and English languages, and will give examples of how this impacts on Welsh names. I will then move on to exploring the complexity of a “British” identity, from the perspective of the indigenous Welsh-speaking community, with an overview of some of the key contextual details regarding political and cultural oppression, particularly where the Welsh language is concerned. I will then discuss the implications of re-

naming and examples of what Pennesi (2016) terms “micro-aggression”, and subsequent “meta-agentive discourses” and apparently emerging trends in Welsh naming practices.

I present my analysis and critique of “White British names”, from an indigenous Welsh perspective, whilst acknowledging that this is but one aspect of the complexity of the concept, with migrant cultures and languages, as well as other indigenous groups, such as Scottish, Irish, Cornish and Manx, having their own distinct complexities within the “British” context; an exploration of the resultant complexity in its entirety is beyond the scope of this paper, but would make for an interesting adjunct analysis.

The Welsh and English languages – and the impact on names and naming

It is important to note that, despite their geographical proximity, the Welsh and English languages are entirely different from each other. The Welsh language is one of the ‘Brythonic languages’, from the Celtic branch of languages, which also has a ‘Goidelic’ branch of languages. The Goidelic languages consist of Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic and Manx Gaelic. The Brythonic languages consist of Cumbrian, Cornish, Welsh, and Breton. The English language, meanwhile, comes from the West Germanic branch, which also includes Frisian, Dutch, Flemish, German, and Afrikaans (Davies, 2014, Kindle location 137).

The Welsh alphabet is markedly different from that of English, and includes twenty simple letters and eight digraphs – that is to say, two letters combining to produce a different sound (Davies, 2014, kindle location 2022); these sounds are not present in English, including the following (with notes on pronunciation adapted from Davies 2014):

Ch – as in the Scottish word ‘Lo**ch**’

Dd – as in **The**

Ff – as in **Ford** (the Welsh single F is pronounced like **V**arsity)

Ng – a sound made by closing the throat

Ll – “the unilateral hiss”, blow air through teeth at one cheek

Ph – similar to Ff (used for mutation purposes)

Rh – a softer version of R

Th – a softer version of Dd

It is therefore inevitable that any Welsh words, including names, will be very different in composition from those in the English language. Thus, if we take the above letters and distinct sounds into account, the following Welsh names contain these elements:

Culhwch – This name features in the Arthurian-related tale ‘Culhwch ac Olwen’, and is the name of the hero who invoked the help of King Arthur to accomplish the tasks necessary to win the hand of Olwen (Lewis, 2001, 28).

Dafydd – Derived from the Hebrew meaning darling or friend; the Welsh form of the English name ‘David’ (Gruffudd, 2003, 52).

Ffion – The Welsh for ‘foxgloves’ (Lewis, 2001, 39).

Angharad – this appears to be a very old name, with examples cited from the 8th and 12th centuries of particular individuals bearing this name (Gruffudd, 2003, 15).

Lleucu – An early Celtic saint, the Welsh equivalent to the English name ‘Lucy’ (Lewis, 2001, 55).

Rhian – Maiden (Gruffudd, 2003, 136).

Gethin – russet, dusky (Gruffudd, 2003, 76).

Other linguistic idiosyncrasies of Welsh orthography are apparent in popular Welsh names, for example the names ‘Siôn’, ‘Siân’ and Llŷr carry the circumflex diacritical mark, which indicates a lengthening in the stress of a vowel (Griffiths & Jones, 1995). As well as cultural references, to stories and mythologies, other Welsh first names have been shaped by geographical references in Wales, and environmental or wildlife references, for example: the popular male name ‘Tegid’, from ‘Llyn Tegid’ – Bala Lake (Lewis, 2001, 69); Tryfan – a mountain in Gwynedd (Lewis, 2001, 70); Hefin, shortened from ‘Mehefin’, the Welsh word for June (Gruffudd, 2003, 93); and Llinos – the Welsh name for linnet (Lewis, 2001, 55), which is common bird in the British isles. My paternal grandmother’s name was ‘Alwen’, and she was named after the river Alwen in North Wales, which was near Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, where her father had been raised. Meanwhile, my paternal grandfather, Alwen’s husband, was named ‘Glyn’, which derives from ‘vale’ or ‘valley’ (Lewis, 2001, 42).

Clearly, then, Welsh personal names differ from those derived from the English language, in terms of spelling and pronunciation. However, historically, there had also been a divergence in terms of naming practices and the composition of the whole name; there is now an observable trend back in the other direction, but let us first discuss the cultural and political factors which have shaped Welsh naming practices through the years.

Welsh-English relations in a British context and the impact on naming practices

Wales has a long history of political and institutional incorporation within the British state. This assimilation began in earnest with the act of union of 1536 and the related act of

1542. Consequently, the Welsh language was removed from all official domains in favour of English (May, 2001). Specifically, within the act of union 1536, there was a ‘language clause’:

“ALSO BE IT enacted by auctoritie aforesaid that all Justices of Commissioners Shireves Coroners Eschetours Stewardes and their lieutenautes and all other officers and ministers of the lawe shall proclayme and kepe the sessions courtes hundreds letes Shireves and all other courtes in the Englisshe Tonge and all others of officers iuries enquestes and all other affidavithes verdicts and Wagers of lawe to be geven and done in the Englisshe tonge. And also that from hensforth no personne or personnes that use the Welshe speche or language shall have or enjoy any maner office or fees within the realme of Englonde Wales or other the Kinges dominions upon peyn of forfaiting the same offices or fees onles he or they use and exercise the speche or language of Englisshe (Davies, 2014, kindle location 437).

The language clause had obvious implications for the Welsh language and culture, including Welsh names and naming practices. In England, ‘settled surnames’ had mainly been adopted between the 12th and 15th centuries, largely in response to the needs of growing towns and bureaucracy. Meanwhile, Wales was less affected by urban influences and pressures as there were few towns and much of the rural population was unaffected by English social practice. Thus, the ancient naming-system had continued until much later. Individuals were identified (or ‘placed’ socially) by their relationships, chiefly in relation to their father so ‘Mab’, ‘ab’ or ‘ap’ (son of) and ‘Ferch’ (daughter of) (Rowlands & Rowlands, 2013, 9-29). Thus Garmon, who was the son of Garth, would have been ‘Garmon ap Garth’.

However, following the Acts of Union, some Welsh families found it necessary to take a single 'surname', which would be a better match for this linguistic and cultural context which privileged 'English' customs. Following on from the patronymic tradition, they tended to choose surnames from within their pedigree, for example the forename of their father or paternal grandfather. Modern surnames demonstrate how the Anglicization of 'ap'/'ab' meaning 'son of', were incorporated into the formation of the new names; for example, Hywel ab Owen, became: Howell Bowen (Rowlands & Rowlands, 2013, 9-29).

Whilst these newly formed surnames, which became settled and used in the way that they are today, eventually replaced the traditional patromymic system, there was, according to Moore (1990), an observable 'intermediate stage', which lasted from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth, when it was common to use a Christian name followed by an *unfixed* surname, the latter of which would often be determined by first names of males in the family. Moore, (1990) gives the following historical example of *unfixed* surnames:

“The great Methodist leader John Elias (who died in 1841) was the son of Elias Jones, who was the son of John Elias” (Moore, 1990).

According to Moore (1990), there was also an allied phenomenon of alternative fixed surnames, and he cites the following example:

“David Morgan Huw of Trefilan, Cardiganshire, who was also known as 'David Morgan' (Moore, 1990).

This second phenomenon, within the intermediate stage, is particularly interesting in the contemporary context, where there appears to be a recent trend towards a naming practice whereby a first and second name are given, as well as the surname, at birth. However, the use of the surname is discouraged and it is becoming increasingly common to observe people using just their first two names. For example, singer, political activist and past president of *Plaid Cymru*, Dafydd Iwan, is not commonly known as ‘Dafydd Iwan Jones’, which is in fact his full name (Wikipedia, 2017). Whilst this could be perceived as being a stage name given his profession, I have had many conversations during the drafting of this paper, which suggest that this is a wide-spread phenomenon amongst current Welsh-speakers. Many individuals have stated emphatically that they favour the use of the two first names, whilst not using their surnames, even where this has led to conflict with, for example, people delivering post to halls of residence.

However, I have not, as yet, discovered any specific reasoning behind this phenomenon, as many of those I spoke with described it in quite general terms of pride, respect for their parent’s wishes, or a not quite tangible feeling or emotion. This is interesting since we clearly do respond emotionally to names and naming practices, and yet this aspect of names is largely missing from the onomastics literature. It would seem, therefore, that there is a gap in our field of knowledge regarding modern Welsh personal names and naming trends; this should be explored fully, with a garnering of opinions and stories from those who are currently using and displaying this particular preference, possibly followed by a mapping exercise, linking back to historical practices and customs.

It is interesting to note that, much as the migrant communities today, in the UK and Canada, are experiencing at least a perceived lack of respect and prestige associated with their names, and thus a pressure to change their names (Pennesi, 2016; Wykes, 2015a, 2015b), this has historically been the case for the indigenous Welsh-speaking community. It

has had a dramatic impact on Welsh names and naming practices and resulted in a masking of Welsh distinctively over the years. That Welsh names now appear to be reversing this trend is also very interesting and can, in context of the overall emerging trend of resistance, be seen as a quiet, peaceful form of protest. In this way, they might also be seen as part of the ‘linguistic landscape’, in much the same way as the place-names in Wales and bilingual signage (Coupland, 2011, 81-84).

In fact, in Elis’ 1957 Welsh-language science fiction novel, which presents two parallel Waleses of the future, it is quite notable that in the dystopian future, where the Welsh language has been expunged, Welsh place names have been replaced with English ones, and the love interest of protagonist Ifan, is, in the dystopian future, called ‘Maria Lark’, as opposed to ‘Mair Llywarch’ (Elis, 2017). Names and naming have, therefore, always been a part of the wider Welsh language struggles, and thus is it is curious that more scholarly attention. This is something I now hope to remedy, beginning with this paper, and subsequently moving to an empirical study to collate data from across Wales and also of Welsh-speakers who reside in other geographic locations.

Renaming, microaggression and Othering: impact and meta-agentic discourses of resistance

In their recent paper, Rivera Maulucci and Moore Mensah (2014) make a point that names which index as being different to that of the dominant language (which in this case was also English) may often be misunderstood and even changed by the speakers of the dominant language within which they reside. In the personal story that María shares, her kindergarten teacher screamed at her “That is not how you write the letter, I”, and forced her to erase the slanted line she had learned to write from her mother, and replace it with the standard English dot (Rivera Maulucci & Moore Mensah, 2015). This is a phenomenon I

myself have had some experience with as my forename, 'Sara', pronounced Səɾə, has led people to assume that it is an affectation on my part, and that I am trying to be posh, rather than go by the name of 'Sarah' – even though this is in fact not my name, and my parents selected the Welsh spelling and pronunciation of 'Sara' to reflect my cultural and familial heritage (Author, 2016).

Meanwhile, Felicia's story reveals that her name, which was formulated by her mother as a composite of the name 'Lisa' and her father's name 'Phil', was altered by her White Southern social studies teacher at school, who claimed that she was unable to pronounce it. This is interesting since the two names from which the name has been composed would index as 'English' in origin and do not contain any difficult linguistic pronunciations such as the 'alveolar trill' (The International Phonetic Association, 1999, p.xxii), or 'rolling r' to give it a more familiar description. This kind of 'renaming' is in fact a widespread phenomenon with regards to Welsh names. During the draft stage of this paper, I have had several conversations where people with names which are particularly Welsh as those discussed above, have been forced either to shorten or alter their names, or else others have done the 'renaming' for them. In my case, some people appear to resolve to simply call me 'Sarah', even if I point out to them that this is not my name.

An example of a famous Welsh person, with a name which very much indexes as Welsh rather than English, is actor Ioan Gruffudd. He has been widely quoted, with accompanying photos on social media, as saying:

“A few people have said that I should change my name and the spelling so that people can say it, but I don't want to, I like it the way it is”(AZ Quotes, 2018).

From this quote, we can see that Ioan is explicitly saying people have challenged him about his name, and have suggested that he should change his name, and that he, in turn, has refused to conform in the manner being requested of him. Furthermore, the following quote from Ioan Gruffudd has also been circulated around social media such as Facebook:

“I’m determined not to lose my name. It’s who I am. It has neither aided my progress nor hampered it. It’s just who I am. My character. My make up. My culture and heritage is a very rich one. So what if it’s difficult for people to pronounce? We all learned to say Schwarzenegger” (IMDb, 2018).

From this quote we can infer, since Ioan Gruffudd is from Wales, that he is making specific reference to his name indexing as Welsh, both linguistically and culturally. Ioan is derived from the Latin *Iohannes* – and thus is the equivalent to the biblical English name ‘John’ (Lewis, 2001, 52). Meanwhile, the Welsh surname ‘Gruffudd’ is a notable old Welsh spelling of the more modern surnames, and sometimes forenames, ‘Griffith’, or ‘Gruffydd’. Historically, the spelling ‘Gruffudd’, was used by the last Prince of Wales, ‘Llywelyn ap Gruffudd’ (died 1282), having previously been the forename of one of the Princes of Wales: Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (died 1063) (Rowlands & Rowlands, 2013, 142-143).

The reasons which have provoked Ioan Gruffudd’s statements regarding his name can be easily traced through very public challenges which have been made regarding his name. For example, in his interview with US talkshow host Jimmy Kimmel in 2015 (Williams, 2015)¹. Kimmel opens the show by telling Ioan Gruffudd that he spent about 25 minutes trying to figure out his name and how to pronounce it. This in itself draws attention to its ‘Otherness’, which participants in Pennesi’s (2016) study on names and naming might term

‘microaggressions’; in her analysis, Pennesi describes these as being things such as “the careless mistreatment of names” (56), whilst one of her participants comments:

People say it’s interesting or unique or “oh that’s different”. When they say “oh that’s different” you think okay well why is it different? Is it because you never heard of it? And I’ve actually said that a few times when people said “oh that’s unusual” I said “why is it unusual?” You know like – then try to like turn the tables on them a little bit because people have to be aware of the implication of what comes out of their mouths...well it’s mostly people with English sounding names who will say “oh that’s different” Or you know “that’s unusual” in that kind of tone...I don’t know what people think. Like I really don’t think that people think about how their reactions are – are read by the person they’re talking to. You know, um and I really think about saying things like um, “Oh your name I Bob? Like really? Your parents couldn’t think of anything better or different? Like how original (Pennesi, 2016).

Here we can see quite a small reference to a name which indexes as Other than English, much the same as Jimmy Kimmel’s opening gambit with Ioan Gruffudd, being taken as a microaggression. It is then quite striking to listen to the rest of the Kimmel-Gruffudd interview, where the talkshow host goes on to make comments such as:

“Your last name is completely preposterous. I don’t know what’s going on over there” (Williams, 2015).

Although this comment was made in a humorous way, it is quite demeaning and has ramifications further than this single interview, and indeed beyond Ioan Gruffudd himself.

Ioan is a popular Welsh forename in Wales, and Gruffudd is not an uncommon surname, and thus anyone bearing either of these names might feel insulted and ‘Othered’ by these comments. Furthermore, a criticism of these names as being preposterous is a direct insult to the language from which they emanate. Kimmel also went further and commented:

“I’d rather have a third ear at least people would have the courtesy not to go on about it?”
(Williams, 2015).

This is somewhat ironic, since Kimmel is the one who began the discussion about Ioan’s name and thus himself is the one being discourteous. Furthermore, if we compare his comments to those made in Pennesi’s (2016) article, which have been framed as ‘microaggressions’ based on ethnicity, these comments might be seen as a part of this same phenomenon. This of course then raises an interesting question with regards to prejudiced behaviour towards Welsh people. Ioan Gruffudd is White, and based on his physical appearance would be expected to experience “White privilege”. He is also, by some definitions, “British”, and thus, it might be considered that he would experience “White British Privilege”. However, with regards to his cultural and linguistic heritage, Ioan is from an indigenous minority community, which has suffered, and still suffers, oppression, both overt and covert; this is most clearly evidenced in reactions towards his name.

It is interesting here to consider the research by Wood et al (2009) which tested UK-based recruitment practices for racial discrimination, by sending out equivalent job applications for vacancies across the UK, with the variable being names commonly associated with minority groups versus ‘White names’; their findings showed that with ethnic minority names, 74% more applications had to be sent out, compared with ‘White names’. The question I would raise here is, when thinking of distinctly Welsh names such as:

‘Buddug Caradog’, ‘Garmon ap Garth’, ‘Dafydd Clwyd’, ‘Lois Awel Gwyn’, ‘Glesni Rhydderch’, ‘Iolo Llwyd’, ‘Lleucu Cyfeiliog’, ‘Gwenlli Myrddin’ – is how these would fare in all aspects of this test. Firstly, at the stage in the research where criteria were being set, would they be indexed as ‘White names’? Would they be identified as ‘British names’? Would they be included in the research at all? Secondly, when employers came across these names, would they index them as ‘White names’ or ‘ethnic minority names’? Then, depending on the reasoning behind the shocking statistic of 74% more applications needed, would candidates with ‘Welsh names’, be at the same disadvantage as those whose names indexed as ‘ethnic minority’ names?

The answer to this surely lies in the reasons behind the decisions made by those sifting applications. If the decisions were made due to negative feelings or perceptions towards ethnic minority groups, specifically on grounds of race, then perhaps not – especially if the names were identified as being ‘White Welsh’ in origin. However, if the decisions were made on the basis of things such as not wanting to have an employee with a name which you consider ‘difficult’, for pronunciation and communication purposes, then perhaps the ‘White Welsh’ applicants, with names of Welsh-origin, would find themselves in the category of high rejections on grounds of name alone.

This brings us to the dichotomy at the heart of this paper – the fact that Welsh-speakers are on the one hand an indigenous, cultural and linguistic minority group, subject to prejudice and negative treatment by the dominant group; on the other hand, the majority of the Welsh-speaking population would index, on physical appearance, as ‘White British’. This then brings us to the interesting discussions which have begun to emerge regarding the embodied nature of names.

Embodied named identity and the paradox of Welsh names

Pilcher (2016) introduced the concept of ‘embodied named identity’ to discuss the idea that:

Names carry strong connotations of embodied, often racialized, identity. Ethnic and racialized bodies are important in the range of social practices by which individuals come to have and be identified by names. So much so, that, for example, a dissonance might be experienced if names are ‘seen’ not to match ethnic or racialized bodily appearance and/ or nationality (Pilcher, 2016).

Pilcher (2016) then goes on to sight an example, taken from Ahmed (2007), about how the surname ‘Ahmed’ slowed her down at border control in the US, despite her British passport, because the surname was perceived to be a Muslim name. Pilcher (2016) then quotes Ahmed (2007) to emphasise the point that names can be as significant as official documents such as passports and also physical appearance:

The right [British] passport makes no difference if you have the wrong body or name (Ahmed, 2007).

The main point being made here is that Sara Ahmed’s surname indexed her as being Other and of ethnic minority origin, and, in particular, from the community or ethnic background which at the time was being perceived as a security threat due to the link with terrorist extremists from this ethnic minority community. This commentary on the impact of her name comes within an article which is about her experiences of inhabiting a white world as a non-white body (Ahmed, 2007).

Incidentally, there is an interesting onomastics faux pas here in Pilcher's (2016) article, in that she spells Ahmed's forename as 'Sarah' (p771). However, Sara Ahmed, whose father hails from Pakistan and whose surname indexes (or is at least perceived here to index as) Muslim, spells her forename without a 'h': Sara. This spelling, as well as being the 'Welsh way', and therefore the way in which I spell my forename, is also the way that most languages and cultures across the world spell this name – apart from in the English language (which also happens to be the most dominant language internationally). A full exploration of this phenomenon warrants an article of its own, however I would say that English speakers expect the English spelling of the name and are often surprised by the alternative spelling. Another interesting phenomenon regarding this name is the pronunciation. I do not know how Sara Ahmed pronounces her forename, but I might guess, given her surname, that she might pronounce it, as I do, with two short 'As' and a rolling 'r', or alveolar trill: Sæɾæ.

However, this name seems to be subject to a somewhat unique mutation in the English language, as two 'As' are never pronounced in a row, without the second one being mutated. So, for example, the name 'Lara', as in Croft, is in English pronounced La:ɾa (Larruh), whereas in Russian, as in Lara Antipova (protoganist of Dr Zhivago), it is pronounced Sæɾæ. This is true for English-speaking pronunciation of other words where two 'As' are noted in a row, so for example: Salad (pronounced Salud), Piranha (Pirannuh), Maasai Mara (Maasai Marruh). I feel that this phenomenon of a mutating second 'A' in English language pronunciation warrants further study in its own right, however here it serves to illustrate the importance of not conflating Welsh and English names as being 'British'.

Madziva's (2017) recent research builds on Pilcher's point of dissonance between racialized physical appearance and names. Her research discusses the perception and treatment of asylum seekers from Pakistan, who are of the Christian faith, who have names which would index as 'English' or Biblical. Interestingly, given the above example relating to

Sara Ahmed, Madziva (2017) states that British immigration officials use Pakistani origin as a proxy for Islam, and thus those migrants who are of Pakistani origin but who bear Christian names are viewed with suspicion. This is then the opposite of the case of Welsh people who have distinctly un-English names, who may index on physical appearance of “White British Privilege”, but their names contradict this; I would argue that the names are a semiotic marker for the deeper issue of prejudice and oppression on grounds of culture and language.

New trends in Welsh names and naming - linked to activism and ‘cool Cymru’?

Anecdotally there is a notable trend in Welsh names in the past few generations. People of my grandparents’ generation had notably Welsh names such as Alwen and Glyn. However, they gave their children names which would not index as Welsh: Raymond and Brenda. Conversations with my parents revealed that they had put quite a lot of thought into naming me, as they wanted a Welsh name, which everyone in the Welsh-speaking community would recognize and be able to pronounce, but that they had also wanted non-Welsh speaking English people to be able to pronounce my name, hence they had chosen ‘Sara’, rather than a more high-visibility Welsh name such as Gwenllian, Gwerfyl, Arhianrhod, Delyth, Ceinwen, Eira or Awen.

This may in part have been influenced also by the fact that we lived in the bordertown of Wrecsam (Welsh spelling intended), where the Welsh language and community are further minoritized, and high-visibility Welsh names are not as common as they are in areas of Wales where the Welsh language is stronger, for example in the county of Gwynedd. This matter of geographic distribution needs to be subject to detailed mapping exercise and quantitative research relating to naming practices. However, back to the matter of generations, I have spoken to many people of around my age cohort who have less than high-visibility Welsh names, or else names which would index as ‘English’. Some described how they would

themselves have liked to have had ‘Welsh names’, and some have gone on to give their own children distinctly Welsh names.

Whilst this phenomenon obviously requires a detailed study in itself, as even a theoretical consideration of possible factors in full is beyond the scope of this article, I would hypothesise that this shift in naming practices may be a part of the general shift towards a more confident and poised Welsh identity, presenting individual and collective ‘meta-agentive discourses’ (Pennesi, 2016) of agency and resistance. The past 80 years or so, been some dramatic changes in the fortunes of the Welsh language and its associated culture and community(ies). Beginning with the Welsh Courts Act (1942), there have been various legislations and associated policies which have brought better status to the indigenous Welsh language – in Wales, rather than in a UK-wide context; I feel it is important to note this, since the rights and privileges afforded under then acts and policies does not extend to England or other parts of the UK, where the Welsh language is therefore currently still marginalized and oppressed.

The Welsh Language Act of 1967 was a significant milestone, although the fundamental principle of the language clause of the Act of Union – that English should be the language of record in the courts - was retained (Davies, 2014, Kindle location 1353). This followed by the Welsh Language Act of 1993, which was subsequently repealed and replaced by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This measure, gives the Welsh language official status in Wales, which means that Welsh should be treated no less favourably than the English language in Wales; it also establishes the role of the Welsh commissioner and her advisory panel and makes various provisions to ensure the promotion and facilitation of the Welsh language, and also the investigation of any infringements of the freedom to use the Welsh language (The Stationary Office, 2011). The most recent piece of legislation is the National Assembly for Wales (official languages) Act 2012, which states that the National

Assembly for Wales shall have two languages, Welsh and English, and that they should be treated equally. It is considered to be particularly significant since it is the first Act passed in Wales to become law in 600 years (National Assembly for Wales, 2012).

As part of the ‘One Wales’ agreement - a coalition agreement between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru for the Welsh Assembly Government 2007-2011 – there came a commitment to establishing a Welsh-medium Higher Education Network to ensure Welsh-medium provision in Welsh Universities. Following four years of preparation work, the ‘Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’ (CCC) (National Welsh-medium College) was established in April 2011. The CCC has budget, resources and specific schemes to enhance Welsh-medium study – which has included a staffing scheme to appoint Welsh-medium lecturers (Davies & Trystan, 2012). Thus courses are delivered through the medium of Welsh, for example I teach health-related modules through the medium of Welsh, as well as social research methodologies.

All of this legislative progress in the status of the language has taken place in the context of wider-reaching language campaigns and initiatives, including the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages, as well as peaceful and direct political protest at a local and national level. In addition, there has been a growing sense of pride and identity which has come from the Welsh music scene, with some bands crossing over from singing exclusively in Welsh, to singing bilingually and thus attracting a larger and more diverse audience, whilst retaining the sense of pride in Welsh identity. This can perhaps be encapsulated by a lyric from the bilingual title song of the album ‘International Velvet’, by the band ‘Catatonia’:

“Everyday when I wake up, I thank the Lord I’m Welsh” (Roberts, 1998).

In this context then, where a sense of Welsh identity is now overtly being stated and considered with pride, including the Welsh language, it would be unsurprising if there were to be an observable trend and shift towards more distinctly Welsh names and naming practices. It would be interesting to discern, quantitatively, if there is in fact a pattern of distribution. This is thus a key area for further study.

Some autoethnographic reflections

I initially came to the field of onomastics because I wrote a paper detailing my experiences of having my Welsh forename anglicized and variously mispronounced and misspelled (Author 2016). I have yet to explore (in a future article) my decision to change my maiden surname (Author maiden surname), which would index as ‘Welsh’, to my now married surname (Author married surname), which would definitely index as English, having its roots as it does in an English word. The reactions to my non-Welsh married surname have surprised me and I have experienced a period of transition as I learn to cope with these new and unexpected reactions to me – namely the questioning of my identity as a legitimately ‘Welsh’ person. This will require careful unpacking, memory mining and the careful preparation of vignettes and analysis, making the connections with the wider cultural context (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

For the timebeing, I think after problematizing the idea of “White British Names” and associated “White British Privilege” (Wykes, 2015a, 2015b), I am left with a sense that it reflects the wider issue of the problematic concept of and kind of “British” identity. The words “British” and “English” tend to be used interchangeably, and yet Welsh people are also expected to identify with this category. For those of us from the Welsh-speaking community this has always been problematic due to the hegemony of the English language and culture. Whilst these are often dismissed as being of marginal importance, I believe that names

provide a solid semiotic resource around which to explore and unpick this relationship. I am reminded of a quote I learned whilst studying modern history at university:

“The word ‘Italy’ is a geographical expression, a description which is useful shorthand, but has none of the political significance the efforts of revolutionary ideologues try to put on it, and which is full of dangers for the very existence of the states which make up the peninsula” (von Metternich, 1847).

Whilst this quote had its own particular resonance within its own context of Italy, it struck a chord with how I was feeling with regards to my status as being ‘British’ and there being a coherent sense of ‘Britain’. As a Welsh-speaker, living and studying in an English university, I found that attitudes towards the Welsh language were in stark contrast to what I had encountered so far whilst living in Wrexham; distaste and disdain was more overtly expressed, in a way that would have been considered racist had it have been towards someone who was of “non-white” appearance. Whilst these attitudes could be dismissed as being due to increased ignorance due to a lack of contact with Welsh people, I would say that the lack of status of the Welsh language in ‘British’ countries other than Wales was also a factor here; the largest factor, however, was the fact that I was Other; I was not English, I was not ‘British’, I was Welsh – with all of the lack of “White British Privilege” that this afforded.

Conclusion

Current discourses in the field of onomastics, with regards to “White British” names, need to be corrected to acknowledge the distinction between names which index as “English”, and those which do not. With this paper, I have highlighted the issues in relation to the indigenous linguistic and cultural minority Welsh-speaking community. In doing so, I

have identified areas which require further study, including the origin and meaning of the emerging trend amongst Welsh-speakers for using two forenames in everyday life, whilst downplaying the surname where possible. A study to explore this phenomenon might also collect a corpus of personal stories with regards to a sense of identity, place and belonging, and the symbolic significance of names and naming practices within Welsh-speaking communities, juxtaposed with English-speaking identities. This research could bring important insights and have far-reaching implications for the debates regarding Welshness and a distinctive Welsh identity.

More broadly, there is scope to explore all permutations which may arise from the diversity of identities which are masked by the catch-all category of “British”, and the concept of there being a coherent sense of “Britain”. This in turn may help unpick some of the issues with regards to feelings of discontentment, disenfranchisement and subsequent conflict and unrest. Coming full circle, I would say that there is definitely scope for considering the similarity of experiences between indigenous, White communities in Wales and migrant communities who move into Wales, with names and naming practices acting as a useful starting point.

Notes

1. Within the newspaper article online, a video of the actual footage can be watched.

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